

Congressman Jared Polis
Veterans Affairs in the 115th Congress

Bills and Letters Led/Co-led:

- Jared is helping lead efforts to address reports that wait times for primary care at certain Colorado VA facilities are among the highest in the country. He sent a letter to Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin in response to the reports and requested answers to how the VA planned to address the long wait times.
 - In response, the VA sent a detailed letter to Jared highlighting several recommendations the VA made in order to improve the level of care at ECHCS. These included hiring additional staff in primary care and mental health services, increasing utilization of the telehealth program, and expanding telephone visits for minor issues.
- Jared introduced the Veterans Conservation Corps Act, a bill that would put veterans back to work restoring and protecting America's public lands and waters.
 - The bill would provide transitional assistance to separating service members, employing them on projects designed to leverage skills developed in the military—in fields including but not limited to water safety, construction, GIS mapping, and as park rangers.
- Jared is an original cosponsor of the Veterans Equal Access Act, led by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR).
 - This bill would make it easier for qualified veterans to access medical marijuana in states where it is legal.
- Jared is an original cosponsor of the Restore Honor to Service Members Act, led by Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI).
 - This legislation would correct the military record of service members discharged solely due to their sexual orientation to reflect their honorable service and reinstate benefits.
- Jared is an original cosponsor of the Veteran Overmedication Prevention Act, led by Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO).
 - The bill requires the VA to work with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to review the deaths of all veterans who died by suicide over the last five years.

Cosponsored Bills:

- Veteran Spouses Equal Treatment Act, led by Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV).
 - This bill amends the definition of "spouse" for the purpose of veterans' benefits to recognize a marriage based on the law of the state where the marriage occurred.
- Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, led by Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN).
 - This bill makes several reforms to the post 9/11 G.I. Bill, allowing more veterans to access education benefits. This bill was signed into law on 8/16/17.
- GI Bill Stem Extension Act, led by Rep. David McKinley (R-WV).
 - This bill gives students utilizing GI benefits more flexibility to pursue degrees in STEM by extending benefits by 9 months.
- Veterans Access to Community Care Act, led by Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA)
 - This bill directs the VA to provide health care to veterans and non-VA facilities to veterans who live further than 40 miles from the closest VA facility.
- PAWS Act of 2017, Led by Rep. Ron DeSantis (R-FL)

- This bill would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make grants to eligible organizations to provide service dogs to veterans with severe post-traumatic stress disorder, and for other purposes.
- Veteran Education Empowerment Act, led by Rep. Lois Frankel (D-FL)
 - This bill would Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a grant program to provide Veteran Student Centers at institutions of higher education to assist veterans in the pursuit of higher education, and for other purposes.
- Burn Pits Accountability Act, led by Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI)
 - This bill would include in periodic health assessments, separation history and physical examinations, and other assessments an evaluation of whether a member of the Armed Forces has been exposed to open burn pits or toxic airborne chemicals, and for other purposes.
- Homeless Veteran Families Act, led by Rep. Mike Coffman (CO-02)
 - This bill would ensure that children of homeless veterans are included in the calculation of the amounts of certain per diem grants.

Key Votes:

- S. 114 – VA Choice and Quality Employment Act of 2017
 - Jared voted NO – this bill was opposed by major veterans groups as it would shift funds away from the VA towards private care. This bill was signed into law on 8/12/17

Casework and Outreach Efforts:

- Jared has helped constituents receive or recoup nearly \$300,000 in veterans' benefits, and closed over 80 military and veteran-related cases in 2017 alone.
- Jared's district office staff attends monthly United Veterans Committee (UVC) of Colorado meetings, attends bi-monthly briefings at ECHCS, and also attends semi-annual congressional briefings at the VA Regional Office in Denver.
- Jared visited and toured the replacement hospital for the Eastern Colorado Health Care System, nearing completion in Aurora. To be called the Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center, the new facility promises to be state-of-art, and is expected to open to patients in the second half of 2018.
- In late summer Jared held a roundtable meeting with the Director of the Eastern Colorado Health Care System (the Denver VA medical center), and the medical Chief-of-Staff, along with representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers who are overseeing the completion and opening of the new facility. The purpose of this meeting was to be updated on the progress of the new hospital, as well as to address some concerns that had been raised about scheduling issues at the hospital.